

Discourses/Articles

by

Swami Krishnananda

The Divine Life Society

Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

SWAMIJI SPEAKS ON 'ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE'

I was reading a book presented to me, namely the practice of Zen through motorcycle maintenance. I went through that book and found that it is so interesting and gives us the whole technique of Sadhana.

'Zen' is a Japanese word for meditation. It is Dhyana, as we have it in Sanskrit. They call it Chaan in Chinese and Zen in Japanese. The Zen practice of motorcycle maintenance – you will be wondering what kind of thing is this. There are different parts of the complicated structure of the motorcycle. No one is aware of their existence. You only want to push a button, sit on it and then run. But how is this button working, how it is running, and how many parts are involved in their cooperative activity harmoniously that with so much affection every nut and bolt is operating? Can you imagine the total action taking place through the multifarious parts that constitute the motorcycle? The maintenance of it involves an equally great attention paid to each and every part, nut and bolt, cleaning, and whatever it is to perfection in the maintenance of a motorcycle.

Our body may be compared to that motorcycle. Every little thing that we think, feel, act, understand are, is important for us. We do not want to leave out any part of our personality – everything is beautiful. Zen considers everything as beautiful. When you sweep the floor, you are not doing a dirty act. It is a great art of perfection, neatness; the broom is an object of attention and not simply a thing about which you can be careless. You wash your vessel with a great art of attention with which you are engaged. So is the case with every action, whether cooking or sewing or making tea or offering anything to the guest that comes. Great art, great perfection, great beauty, great totality – everything is wonderful. This is Zen's perception of all things in the world. Even a leaf in the tree, even the bird that is moving, how beautiful! The bird is moving in the leaves – how beautiful! The leaf is waving – how beautiful! The sun is shining – how beautiful! The river is flowing – how beautiful! The mountain is standing – how beautiful! Why don't you say it is all beautiful instead of grudgingly staying "stupid"? Zen does not accept all these things (as stupid).

So likewise in the practice of Sadhana there is no stupid thing in this world that can be brought before our attention. Even our thoughts are not stupid. They have to be taken care of as our own children. We may have naughty children, it doesn't matter, but they are our children only. All children of a parent are not of the same type. They are all different – one differs from the other totally in many respects, yet they have to be taken care of as a single total of the unit of family. In a similar manner are the ways in which we have to conduct ourselves in relation to the world. A little attention is to be paid to every thought that comes to the mind. Manana is only this much. If a thought comes,

adore it, worship it. "My dear child, what do you want? Why has this thought come to me?" Give it what it wants. It will go; it will not cry afterwards. But if you tell the thought, "You idiot, go. I don't want you," then it will come back yelling with greater force. So no thought should be brushed aside as unwanted, because it is your child, it has come through your brain and you are throwing it away. It has arisen because it has a necessity – it won't come unnecessarily. That necessity should be understood by you by a careful psychoanalytical attention paid to it. All thoughts are your thoughts – you must understand. They are not somebody's. So, you cannot reject them unless you reject your own self partly, which cannot be done.

So yoga is not a rejection of any particular, but an inclusion of all things in a total whole with a beautiful vision of all existences, as a Zen master tells you. That is Sadhana.